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SUBJECT: BTEX FORENSIC EPIDEMIOLOGY WORKSHOP CATALYZES G8 EFFORTS AGAINST BIOTERRORISM

REF: A. STATE 8958

[B](#). 06 STATE 112285

[C](#). 05 STATE 230244

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The UK and Germany co-hosted, with U.S. co-sponsorship, the G8 "Forensic Epidemiology Workshop," in London March 13-15, 2007 (Ref A). Although the U.S. was the primary source for workshop design and facilitation, all three nations worked collaboratively to plan and execute the event. The highly successful workshop combined principles of public health, epidemiology, and law enforcement in investigating suspected bioterrorism -- and brought together for the first time public health, law enforcement, and foreign affairs officials from all G8 nations plus the EU/EC. Incorporating innovative tabletop exercises, the workshop was an important first step in strengthening communication and collaboration both across sectors and across borders. Importantly, the dynamic workshop stimulated the first-ever public declarations of support from Germany and other G8 partners for the ongoing work of the G8 Bioterrorism Experts Group (BTEX). Germany also noted publicly the synergy with extant G8 Counterterrorism efforts through Roma-Lyon -- a critical step in moving forward with G8 efforts to combat bioterrorism. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) The UK and Germany co-hosted, with U.S. co-sponsorship, the G8 "Forensic Epidemiology Workshop," in London March 13-15, 2007 (Ref A). Although the U.S. was the primary source for workshop design and facilitation, all three nations worked collaboratively to plan and execute the event. The highly successful workshop combined principles of public health, epidemiology, and law enforcement in conducting concurrent criminal and epidemiological investigations of suspected bioterrorism threats or incidents -- and brought together for the first time public health, law enforcement, and foreign affairs officials from all G8 nations plus the EU/EC. Incorporating U.S.- and UK-designed tabletop exercises along with plenary sessions and country presentations on joint law enforcement-public health investigations, the workshop was an important first step in strengthening communication and collaboration both across sectors and across borders. The Chairs' Summary (para 9) highlights, in particular, the workshop's formidable political and policy achievements in catalyzing G8 partners to an enhanced commitment to combating

bioterrorism; a full USG report on the workshop itself will follow via septel.

SEA CHANGE IN G8 VIEWS OF BIOTERRORISM EFFORTS

13. (SBU) Since initiating at Sea Island in 2004, the G8 efforts to combat bioterrorism through the G8 Bioterrorism Experts Group (BTEX), the U.S. has usually been the primary or, at times, only voice within the G8 pushing for continued work in this critical area of counterterrorism cooperation. Various G8 partners have supported the U.S. in this (most notably Canada, Germany, and Japan), but most G8 partners have typically been more passive partners -- reacting to U.S. initiatives but rarely if ever proactively engaging in G8 efforts to prepare for or respond to bioterrorism. But, the Forensic Epidemiology Workshop in London represents a pronounced shift in G8 support for BTEX's continued work. The UK decision in late 2006 to co-host the workshop was the first step in this shift -- and was a direct result of FBI and HHS/CDC discussions with their UK law enforcement and public health counterparts who, in turn, encouraged their colleagues at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to take action. Together, the U.S. and the UK approached Germany about co-hosting the workshop (given the German G8 Presidency). According to German officials, Germany came on board somewhat reluctantly and unsure of the potential value of this work. The months of preparatory work -- involving collaboration among law enforcement, public health, and foreign affairs

officials from all three countries -- set the stage for the dynamic and successful workshop and, significantly, German and British forceful declarations of support for BTEX's ongoing efforts, which also recognized the unique multi-sectoral nature of BTEX initiatives.

14. (SBU) All G8 nations sent robust, thoughtfully composed delegations for the Workshop. While not every delegation included all three sectors (law enforcement, public health, foreign affairs), all delegations participated actively and extensively in every aspect of the workshop -- including the three tabletop exercises focused on the themes of: (1) intersectoral information sharing, (2) overt bioterrorism attack, and (3) covert bioterrorism attack. Notably, for the first time ever, Russia sent an appropriate delegation from Moscow for a BTEX event, including two foreign affairs officials from the MFA's New Threats (counterterrorism) division, and two public health experts. While it was clear that countries are at varying levels of sophistication in intersectoral collaboration in bioterrorism-related investigations, it was equally clear that the workshop (particularly the innovative, interactive tabletop exercises) stimulated great interest in ways to develop such multi-sectoral capacity -- and strong linkages were forged between sectors and across borders on these issues. Although not an official host, the U.S. was clearly seen as the leading force both in this workshop and in this work in general -- and the workshop participants drew particularly on the combined expertise of the eight U.S. facilitators from the FBI, HHS, and CDC. These U.S. facilitators, along with several UK counterparts (from Scotland Yard and the Health Protection Agency) and two German facilitators with infectious disease backgrounds, were responsible for bringing a diverse group of technical and policy officials through a complex, interactive series of exercises and plenary sessions. Their design and preparation paid off handsomely in a smoothly run workshop that stimulated energetic discussion, recognition of the concrete importance of

multi-sectoral collaboration, and, importantly, declarations of G8 nations' support for the importance of BTEX's continued work.

FIRST TIME PUBLIC DECLARATIONS OF SUPPORT FOR BTEX

15. (SBU) At the German-hosted reception during the workshop, the German head of delegation (Alexander Olbrich) emphasized in his toast that the workshop reinforced for Germany the critical importance and value of G8 efforts to combat bioterrorism through BTEX's work. Olbrich and the UK's Sarah Broughton had each indicated, in earlier conversations, strong Russian resistance to continued support for BTEX under the G8 Nonproliferation Directors' Group (NPDG), and Olbrich took the dramatic step of indicating that as far as Germany was concerned, BTEX work would continue and expand in 2007 -- if not through NPDG then through G8 counterterrorism (Roma-Lyon) efforts or other G8 channels. Germany's remarks generated quite a buzz among G8 delegations, and many sought out the U.S. head of del (Marc Ostfield) for consultation about U.S. ideas for next steps for BTEX, including creating a G8 BTEX tabletop exercise on Food Defense (Ref B), and, most notably, the possibility of moving G8 BTEX work to the Roma-Lyon channel where it would have greater synergy with extant G8 counterterrorism efforts. It was clear that not only were Germany, the UK, Japan, and France making strong declarations of support for BTEX, but that they were interested in exploring ways for BTEX to become a Roma-Lyon subgroup. Acknowledging that BTEX never had much traction within NPDG, these delegations -- composed primarily of MFA non-proliferation officials -- were motivated to find a better G8 fit for BTEX to further the G8 agenda on combating bioterrorism.

16. (SBU) It is worth noting that Olbrich also stated in his toast that G8 BTEX efforts were "valued-added" and not redundant with the bioterrorism work in the Global Health Security Action Group (GHSAG), the coalition of Health Ministers of the so-called "G7 plus Mexico." In subsequent conversations, officials from the UK, France, and Japan echoed Olbrich's sentiment about BTEX. In fact, a UK health official expressed the opinion that the G8 forum was particularly productive because BTEX includes foreign affairs, law enforcement, agriculture, and other sectors beyond just health. Such sentiments help enhance G8 nations' support for BTEX's continued work.

17. (SBU) On the workshop's final day, Broughton arranged for Esther Blythe of the FCO's counterterrorism division to meet with Ostfield and Lindsey Hillesheim of the U.S. delegation. Blythe expressed clear UK interest in constituting BTEX as a subgroup of G8 Roma-Lyon efforts, and offered that the UK could possibly co-sponsor with the U.S. such a proposal at the upcoming Roma-Lyon meeting in Berlin. Separately, Olbrich had likewise indicated that he would talk with his Roma-Lyon counterparts in the German foreign ministry to advocate for continuing BTEX work under the auspices of Roma-Lyon counterterrorism efforts. Japanese and French officials signaled that they, too, would be having similar conversations in Tokyo and Paris. (NOTE: Canada had, almost two years earlier, signaled its awareness of BTEX synergy with G8 CT efforts and had, as far back as December 2005 (Ref C), switched its representative for BTEX from a nonproliferation official to a counterterrorism official with responsibility for Roma-Lyon efforts. Russia, meanwhile, had indicated to UK and German officials its disdain for BTEX in NPDG channels. However, Russia, by sending MFA CT officials to the Workshop,

has possibly signaled its openness to G8 work on bioterrorism and to continuing BTEX in Roma-Lyon channels. END NOTE.)

18. (SBU) Thus, in addition to being an important and concrete example of valuable interagency teamwork involving FBI, HHS, CDC, and State, the Workshop was an invaluable catalyst for a deepening commitment within the G8 for further efforts to combat bioterrorism. Since 2004, the U.S. has sought to keep BTEX and G8 bioterrorism-related work alive through the somewhat passive (on this issue) UK G8 Presidency of 2005, and the resistant (on this issue) Russian G8 Presidency of 2006, the dynamic bioterrorism workshop last week created the perfect venue and opportunity for Germany to signal its strong support for BTEX. Germany has now indicated its interest in hosting follow-on G8 bioterrorism-related work in Berlin later this year, along with the next BTEX policy meeting in 2007. German support has, likewise, helped encouraged enhanced Japanese interest -- of particular importance because Japan takes up the G8 Presidency in 2008. Japanese officials are now contemplating the possibility of hosting in 2008 the proposed G8 BTEX Food Defense Tabletop Exercise (Ref B). The U.S.'s exemplary interdisciplinary and interagency teamwork in developing the Forensic Epidemiology Workshop has helped solidify the groundwork for potentially two solid years of support for collaborative G8 efforts to combat bioterrorism.

19. (U) BEGIN TEXT OF CHAIRS' SUMMARY.

G8 FORENSIC EPIDEMIOLOGY WORKSHOP, 13-15 MARCH 2007: CHAIRS' SUMMARY

The G8 held a workshop from 13-15 March 2007 to share perspectives on the importance of a coordinated approach by public health professionals, law enforcement, and other agencies in conducting joint epidemiological and law enforcement bioterrorism investigations and to recommend ways to pursue and promote such an approach more widely.

This was the first multi-sectoral meeting for public health, law enforcement and foreign affairs officials in the G8 framework on this important topic. Participants came from all G8 members as well as a representative from the UN as an observer.

Within G8 countries levels and experience of joint investigations varies. Participants heard examples of where joint working had been used in the past successfully and discussed the potential benefits of joint working. Participants agreed that joint investigations add value and are beneficial.

Participants shared perspectives and experiences on collaborative efforts by law enforcement and public health officials to investigate suspected bioterrorism incidents. Through three table-top exercises and plenary discussions, workshop participants shared and discussed national law enforcement and public health policy and procedural issues in order effectively to identify, assess, respond to a bioterrorism/weapons attack and to enable a prosecution. All delegations presented their current experience of joint working between law enforcement and public health.

Participants considered potential impediments to law enforcement-public health collaboration, and agreed that it would be useful to develop effective strategies to address them within a nation and among G8 nations.

The workshop emphasized the international dimension of bioterrorism and noted that some lines of

communications exist on the law enforcement side by using Interpol offices but that bilateral contacts are currently the primary mechanism. On the public health side there are also bilateral contacts and the established reporting and alarm systems of the WHO, designed primarily for natural diseases.

Participants agreed that to pursue effective forensic epidemiology through law enforcement-public health collaboration to assist with investigations into bioterrorism and other relevant incidents it was necessary at a national level to:

- Identify all the relevant public bodies responsible for investigating crimes affecting the public's health, as well as those responsible for investigating the cause of infectious diseases and preventing their spread and create networks to enable collaborative investigations;

- Develop and implement or refine procedures or arrangements for conducting joint investigations on potential biological terrorism incidents or other public health problems resulting from criminal or other intentional actions;

- Identify ways to strengthen the capacities of public health and law enforcement official public bodies related to joint investigations of bioterrorism events, such as: disease surveillance and reporting; laboratory capacities for testing and identifying biological terrorism agents; training law enforcement and public health representatives to understand the priorities of epidemiologic work on a crime scene; and developing common procedures for the safe collection of samples and to maintain a chain of custody that fulfills both the requirements of jurisdictional prosecution as well as laboratory and medical practice.

Internationally, it would be beneficial to identify regional and international organisations that can help to build networks and procedures towards enabling collaborative investigations.

Participants agreed that the workshop was very useful and a successful exchange of views and experiences in national and international co-operation of law enforcement and public health. It provided insights and ideas that may provide information for improving national systems or agreeing best practices. Participants agreed that further work in the G8 grouping on forensic epidemiology and other topics relevant to bioterrorism would be valuable. The successful outcome of this workshop is an incentive to

continue close co-operation of G8 members in the Bioterrorism Experts Group (BTEX) to improve G8 common efforts in combating bioterrorism.

END TEXT OF CHAIRS' SUMMARY.

110. (U) This cable has been cleared by the USG BTEX delegation.

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